GSWS 101-3: Gender Talk (Breadth-Social Sciences)

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Lecture: Thursdays 17:30 – 19:20; B 9200

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Office hours: TBA

Course Description:
It seems that “gender” is more and more knowable at our current moment: we have viral campaigns such as “slut walk” and #YesAllWomen; we celebrate transgender actresses such as Laverne Cox; Vancouver is very close to requiring explicitly transgender-friendly signage on the locker room doors of its public recreation facilities; SFU students created the lauded “Harassment on Transit” website last year; and, every popular website from HuffPo to Buzzfeed seems poised to critically analyze gender in films, TV, politics, and literature. The animating questions for Gender Talk are deceptively simply: how did we get here? Where else might we have ended up? Where are we headed? Perhaps most importantly: what are we missing?

The basic premise for this course is that gender is a historical, aesthetic, and political creation that can change drastically across eras, cultures, and classes. This means that our operating mode will be to ask what gender could be or become, rather than try to define what it is. We will read a wide variety of texts, drawing from Literature, Geography, Sociology, Philosophy, Psychoanalysis, and Film, as well as more experimental work that defies such categorizations. Rather than see “marginal” or excluded genders as minor case studies, we will see that standing outside of “normal” gender gives us the best perspective on how “normal” gender is constructed – and how to change it. Students can expect to hear about sex, transgender, race, feminism, queerness, activism, radicalism, masculinity, femininity, and conflict on a regular basis.

Learning Outcomes:
- to become familiar with key theories and studies of gender and be able to respond to them
- to develop a capacity to critically ‘read’ public discourses of gender through the lens of gender scholarship
- to rethink the constraints of one’s role in reproducing and redefining gender and its norms-to learn how to allow oneself to be uncomfortable, uncertain, confused, and creative with regards to gender

Course Texts and Courseware:
1. Custom courseware, SFU bookstore
2. Articles available through the SFU library site
3. Sexing the Cherry by Jeanette Winterson
4. Film screenings TBA

Course Evaluation and Assignments:
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<th>Participation &amp; Weekly Reading Reports</th>
<th>Midterm Exam</th>
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<td>Pop Culture Analysis (Paper)</td>
<td>Final Exam</td>
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Note: unlike most intro courses (eg. Chemistry), this course is about a topic that most students already consider constantly and experience consciously. Yet, the goals of this course are to unlearn many of our received truths about gender and to learn to be able to sit comfortably with uncomfortable ideas. What would life be like if we didn’t know what gender is, or weren’t sure what it ought to become? As in other disciplines (eg. Religious Studies), students are not required to personally adopt every idea they study; however, students should be prepared to vigorously entertain every topic by questioning themselves and their cultures. One way you will do this is through weekly tutorials with teaching assistants. Be prepared for fresh and tough dialogue!

Prerequisite: Students who have taken WS 101 at SFU may not take GSWS 101 for further credit.